

Safety and wellbeing in the PALM scheme

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Strawberry farm, Queensland

Overview of the PALM scheme

- Pacific Seasonal Worker Pilot Scheme commenced in 2008 and has continually evolved (Seasonal Worker Program, SWP)
- Pacific Labour Scheme (PLS) started July 2018 with 59 workers from Northern Australia Worker Pilot Program – capped until 2019.
- COVID-19 impact – increased from around 8,000 workers in February 2020, to 31,500 at end of October 2022 (11,087 long-term, 20,413 short-term)
- On 4 April 2022 the government brought the SWP and PLS together under the consolidated, demand-driven PALM scheme.
- See website: <https://www.palmscheme.gov.au>

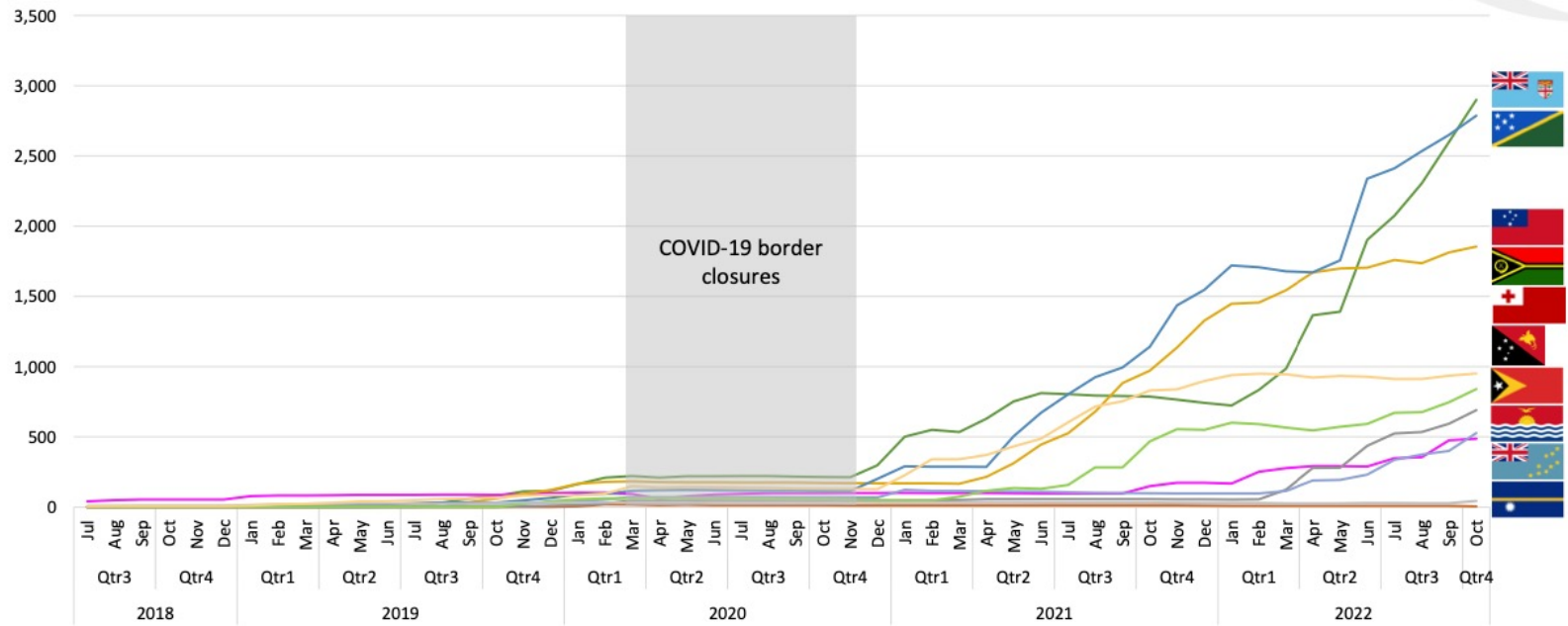
Source: Jeffress, L., Kimber, M., Lynn, I. and Shillito, C. 2022. The long-term PALM scheme: triple win during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. Australasian AID Conference 2022, 30 November 2022, Australian National University, Canberra.
https://devpolicy.org/2022-Australasian-AID-Conference/presentations/PALM-scheme-during-COVID-19_CShillito.pdf



Countries of origin (PLS)

Most long-term workers come from Fiji and the Solomon Islands, followed by Samoa, Vanuatu, Tonga, PNG, Timor-Leste, Kiribati, Tuvalu, and Nauru

Number of workers by country of origin between July 2018 and October 2022



Source: Jeffress et al 2022



Gender of workers and type of industry, PLF workers

- By October 2022, **80% of PLS workers were men** and 20% were women
- The increase in the proportion of men is attributed to the **rapid growth of workers in meat processing**, which is 89% male worker dominated
- By October 2022, **67% of PLS workers were in meat processing, 22% in agriculture** and the rest (11%) in aged care; forestry, fishing and other; and hospitality/tourism

Source: Jeffress et al 2022



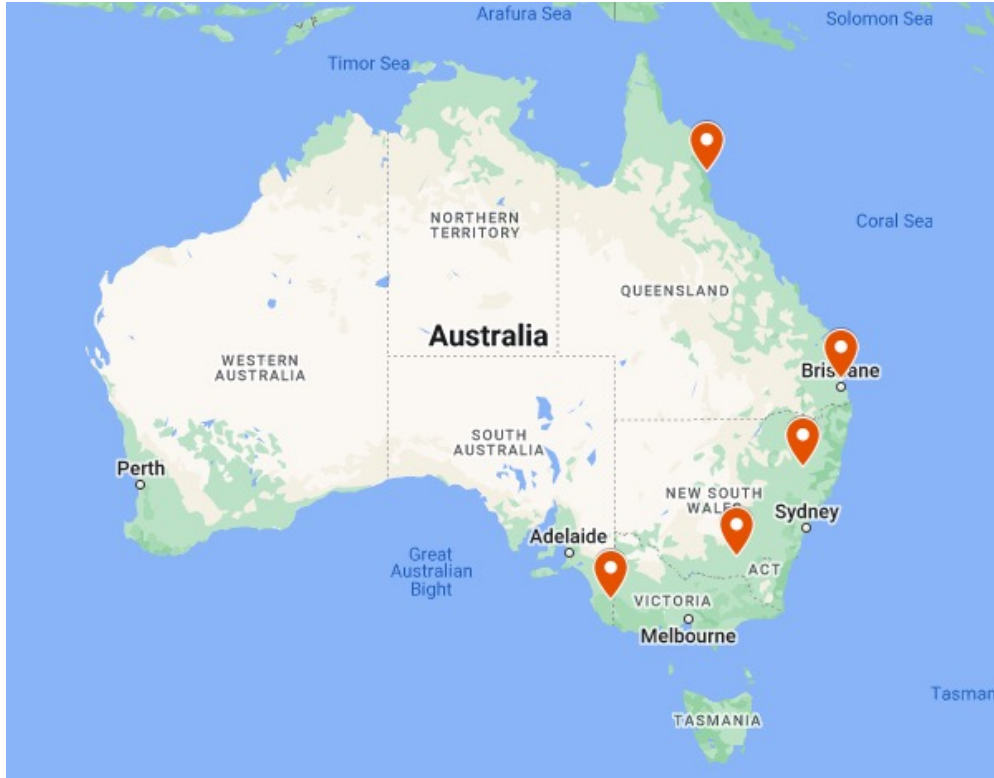
Our research objective

The objective of the study was to investigate the safety and wellbeing experiences of men and women participating in the PALM scheme in Australia.



Banana packing shed, Queensland

Locations



Source: Google Maps

- Cairns, Qld
 - Caboolture, Qld
 - Tamworth, NSW
 - Wagga Wagga, NSW
 - Naracoorte, SA
-
- Data collection: Apr to Nov 2022

Methods



Talanoa session, Regional Accelerator Forum, Cairns

- Worker survey (303 responses)
- Stakeholder survey (54 responses)
- Interviews (107 people)
 - 47 in person
 - 60 phone or video call
- Observations (8 events)
 - Regional Accelerator Forums:
 - » Caboolture
 - » Cairns
 - » Tamworth
 - » Wagga Wagga
 - Regional network meetings:
 - » S.E. Qld (online and in person)
 - » South Australia (online)

People we spoke with (n=107)

Category	No.
PALM scheme workers (includes PLS, SWP and disengaged workers and team leaders from horticulture, meat processing and aged care sectors)	44
Community sector (includes civil society organisations, Pacific diaspora, sport etc)	19
Approved employer representatives (includes direct employers, labour hire companies and labour hire host sites)	15
Government sector (includes local councils, federal government, state police services, Pacific Labour Facility staff, Pacific Country Liaison Officers)	15
Health sector (includes health insurance providers, General Practitioners, sexual health nurses, hospital employees)	7
Religious (includes pastors or religious affiliated organisations)	4
Accommodation providers	2
Union representatives	1
	Total 107



Surveys' results



Worker survey respondents (n=303)

Program	No.	%
Pacific Labour Scheme	226	76.3
Seasonal Worker Program	22	7.4
PALM scheme	42	14.2
Don't know	3	1.0
Other	3	1.0

Gender	No.	%
Male	226	75.6
Female	72	24.1
Transgender	1	0.003

State	No.	%
Queensland	109	36.3
New South Wales	82	27.3
Victoria	40	13.3
Western Australia	31	10.3
South Australia	17	5.7
Northern Territory	13	4.3
Tasmania	6	2.0
Australian Capital Territory	1	0.3
Other	1	0.3



Stakeholder survey respondents (n=54)

Stakeholder type	No.	%
Approved employer - direct	17	31
Community sector	8	15
Approved employer – labour hire	6	11
Religious affiliated	4	7
Local/regional service provider	4	7
Other	3	6

Stakeholder type (contd)	No.	%
Labour hire host site	3	6
Pacific Labour Facility staff	3	6
Local government	2	4
Federal government	2	4
Police	1	2
Accommodation provider	1	2

Perceptions of workers versus stakeholders

How much of a problem.....	Workers' perceptions		Stakeholders' perceptions	
	Weighting	Ranking	Weighting	Ranking
Extramarital affairs/relationship breakdowns	2.65	1	1.9	1
Issues relating to children back home	2.72	2	2.65	4
Pregnancy	2.87	3	2.56	3
Mental health	3.13	4	2.49	2
Physical health	3.19	5	2.67	5

How much of a problem.....	Workers perceptions		Stakeholders perceptions	
	Weighting	Ranking	Weighting	Ranking
Employment issues (e.g pay, conditions, workplace conflict)	2.75	1	2.42	2
Financial issues	2.84	2	2.50	3
Workplace injury	2.92	3	2.82	4
Accommodation	3.02	4	2.13	1



Perceptions of workers versus stakeholders (contd)

How much of a problem.....	Workers perceptions		Stakeholders perceptions	
	Weighting	Ranking	Weighting	Ranking
Drinking too much alcohol	2.58	1	1.79	1
Dangerous driving	2.66	2	2.27	2
Other drugs (eg marijuana)	2.89	3	2.82	5
Other (non-GBV) types of fighting	2.99	4	2.69	4
Interpersonal conflict (e.g. arguments)	3.00	5	2.51	3
Men hurting women	3.11	6	2.82	=5



Barriers to safety/wellbeing support

Stakeholder responses	No.	%
Workers are shy or embarrassed to seek support	40	75.5
Language barriers	37	69.8
Cultural barriers	36	67.9
Lack of services in regional areas	27	50.9
Lack of culturally appropriate services	26	49.1
Lack of information	25	47.2

Worker responses	No.	%
Worried about losing job or visa	164	56.4
Shy or embarrassed to ask for help	156	53.6
Not confident speaking English	122	41.9
Not sure where to go	105	36.1
Services don't understand Pacific culture	78	26.8
Hard to get transport	65	22.34



Who workers turn to for help if a problem with safety

(From workers survey, n=300)

	Number	%	Ranking
My employer	96	32.0	1
Team leader	82	27.3	2
Pacific Labour Facility/PALM support phone line	54	18.0	3
Friends or family in home country	31	10.3	4
Pacific friends or family in Australia	15	5.0	5
Australian friends	7	2.3	6
Church pastor/minister/priest	6	2.0	7
Other (please specify)	9	3.0	NA



Gender differences in workers' survey responses

- Women workers were more likely to see all personal problems as more of a problem (statistically significant)
- Work issues no difference except for accommodation which women saw as more of a problem (statistically significant)
- Women workers also saw all social issues as more of a problem (statistically significant)
- No significant differences between men and women about barriers, although a higher % of women said they worry about job or visa 64.8% compared to 53.2% of men
- No statistical difference in the responses to who they would go to for help if a problem with safety



Stakeholders' views on what needs strengthening

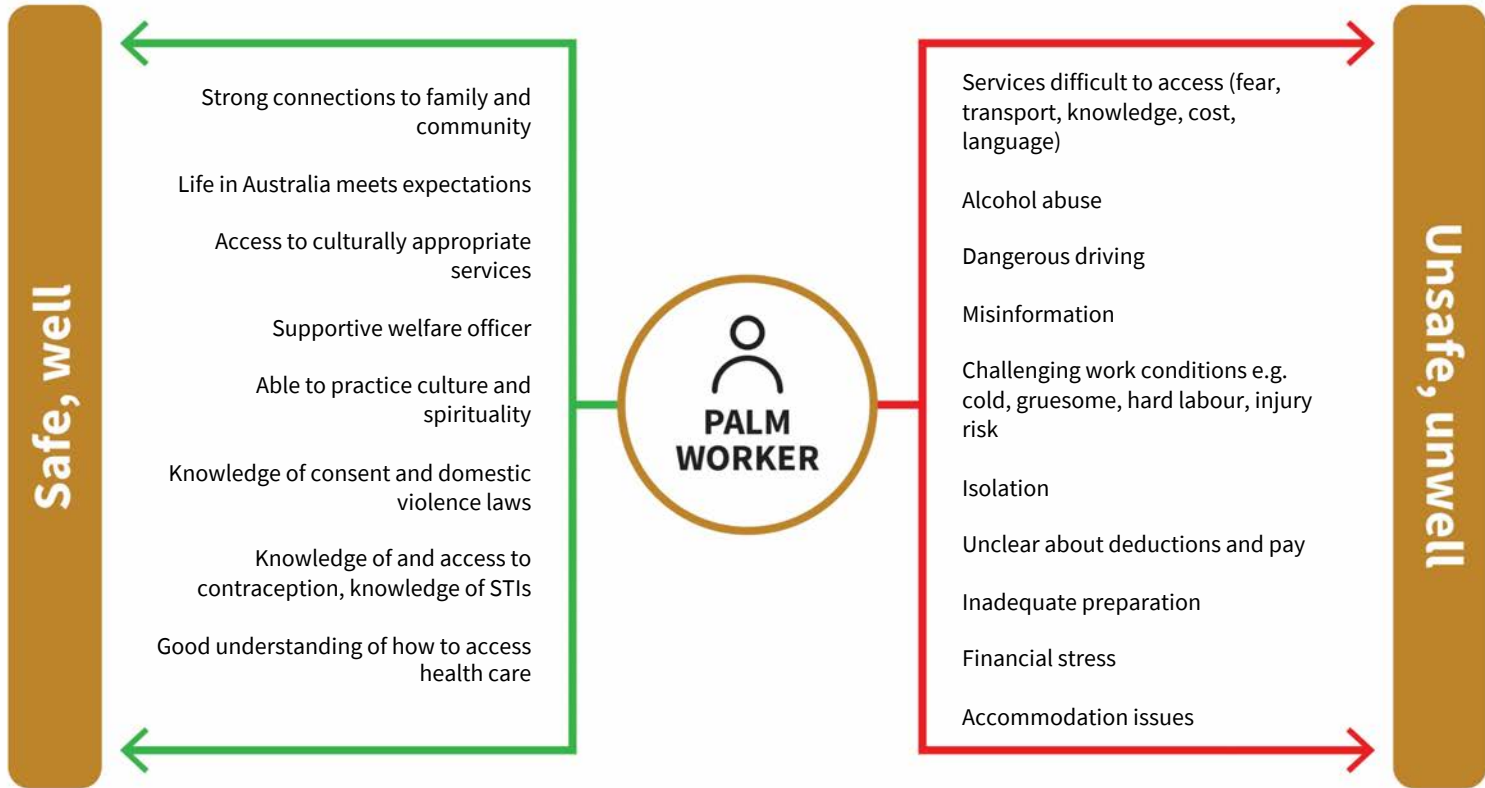
(From stakeholders survey, n=53)

	Score	Ranking
Health	5.82	1
Community services	5.22	2
Pacific diaspora organisation	4.55	3
Church	4.40	4
Police	4.02	5
Union	3.08	6
Other	0	0

Qualitative research – themes from interviews



Factors influencing safety and wellbeing



Some key issues



- SWP-PLS alignment not complete – separate deeds, overlapping roles.
- Data not accessible or transparent.
- Temporary nature of visas means workers are invisible.
- Approved employers are responsible for worker welfare but workers fear losing their job and visa.
- Limited options for independent, local, culturally safe support.
- Lack of agency – workers need their employer to make health insurance claims, enrol in skills training.

Positive feedback

“In terms of well being and safety it is currently all good for us here..”

“I'm so grateful for this opportunity to work here in Australia”

“Just wanna thanks for the supports and the understanding and also this company.”

“It has been an honour & a privilege to be selected as one of those successful candidates, through the Partnership Agreement between the Government of Australia and Fiji.. Its surely living a dream and stepping closer to that ambition that we always wish for..A Big Vinaka Vakalevu..”

“Thankful of this survey”

“I wanna thank you for this survey”



Health

- Understanding of health insurance
- Transport and logistics of appointments
- Access to culturally appropriate GP service
- Inadequate health screening before arrival - pre-existing conditions
- Mental health – not covered by insurance
- Sexual and reproductive health – antenatal care, contraception use, pregnancy terminations



Alcohol

- Alcohol consumption
- Associated behaviours – assault
- Biggest issue affecting wellbeing?
- Differing views - dry site versus freedom

Driving

- Driver training and licensing
- Drink driving



Regional New South Wales

Pay and conditions

- Lack of understanding of deductions
- No familiar with formal employment
- Varying role of Team Leaders
- Workers reported:
 - lack of protective equipment
 - having to lift unsafe weights
 - not receiving minimum hours
 - being shouted at
 - workplace injuries



Berry farm, Queensland

Accommodation

“The Apartment is our problem”

“Accommodation is very important for our well being during our work here in Australia, both in mental and social health and it's our home.”

“Wellbeing especially accommodation issues have took long to fix or not fixed by responsible authorities.”



Welcome to
LAKELAND



Knowledge and impact of RAFs and other initiatives on welfare arrangements

Regional Accelerator Forums

Mixed feedback on RAFs from attendees depending on location

Community Connections

Played an important role in some places; no or limited profile in other locations

Telephone line

Complaints that it is not always answered; not well known among workers; limited follow up

Regional engagement managers and other positions

Governance problematic – separate deeds, arrangements and legacy staff of different programs

AEs' responsibility for welfare matters

Degree of responsibility is problematic



Case study

NSW Riverina meat industry

Wagga Wagga Region PLF statistics 12/20-2/22

AEs

1. Meat works - 148 males (78 Fijians, 45 Samoans, 17 Sol I, 8 Tongans)
2. Meat works – 307 of which 79 females (125 Fijians, 98 Samoans, 58 Tongans, 26 Sol I)
3. Labour hire company – 56 males (50 Sol I, 6 Tongans)
4. Labour hire company – 1,206 of which 173 females (389 Sol I, 277 Fiji, 258 Samoa, 52 Tongans, 27 Vanuatu, 26 Kiribati, 4 Tuvalu)

Welfare cases n=114

- » 50 end of employment (lot of abscondees)
- » 20 workplace injury
- » 13 physical health
- » 8 (negative) conduct
- » 8 change of hours (reduction?)
- » 4 police engagement
- » 11 other

Of the 114 cases, 72 (63.2%) related to one abattoir.



Meat industry – specific issues

- Large and difficult work places, very hyper-male dominated culture
- Impersonal, often rude and abusive language, pay lower than fellow workers
- Critical role of labour hire – local representatives can be good and very bad (improvements if abattoir GM and HR officer take an active interest)
- Long hours, difficult to mix in local community, involved in fellowship, sport and drinking
- Shorter weeks in (non-feedlot) beef abattoirs (seasonal) – income doesn't cover costs



Photo by [André Bjørkhaug](#), [Unsplash](#)

Range of practices

Good practices

- Increases in pay to reflect skills and comparable to other workers in the area of work
- Clear and regular statements about deductions
- Effective worker representation through (paid?) team leaders and welfare officers
- Direct engagement of meat works' management and HR staff in workplace issues and social activities
- Outreach work by labour hire welfare officers, and reasonable worker/wo ratios
- Key driver (NGO/voluntary assoc) to advocate and build networks of support

Bad practices

- Threatening to send workers home if they raise issues or walk off
- Labour hire company staff sit in offices; do not respond or never follow up
- Unrelenting work output, lack of interest in workers' wellbeing at work (incl injury)
- Not dealing with racism, sexism and bullying in the workplace
- Advocating workers take annual leave during low season



Opportunities

- Culturally safe services available for Pacific diaspora in metro Qld
- Migrant settlement services have the right skills and knowledge to support PALM workers
- Local multicultural councils in NSW (vary) and engagement of local police in information sessions
- Importance of social media, and the support of the cohort they arrived with in Australia



Banana farm, Queensland

Opportunities (contd.)

- Outreach model by welfare officers employed by labour hire companies and AEs
- Regular local information sessions and social activities (harnessing local advocates and networks)
- Promoting the advantages to Australian communities eg PLF model (7/18 to 10/22) estimates:
 - » 250 AEs' profit \$289 million
 - » workers' expenditure on goods \$136.7 million
 - » rent \$74.2 million
 - » workers' donations \$6.1 million (cited in Jeffress et al 2022)
- Proactive approach to federal government plans including the announced:
 - » a more supported family accompaniment model (with Family Tax Benefit and Child Care Subsidy)
 - » funding a further 500 PALM scheme workers to complete their Certificate III in Individual Support (Ageing) to work in the aged-care sector in Australia
 - » expand worker numbers to 35,000 by June (noting that scheme remains uncapped)
 - » dedicated resources to intensify action against unscrupulous operators encouraging workers to disengage from the scheme (cited in Jeffress et al 2022)



Current consultations on the domestic delivery of the PALM scheme

- Transfer of functions and responsibilities from the PLF to the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR)
- **Discussion paper** ‘Optimising the PALM scheme delivery in Australia’ (<https://www.dewr.gov.au/pacific-australia-labour-mobility-scheme/resources/optimising-palm-scheme-delivery-australia-discussion-paper>)
- Closing date **13 January 2023 5pm**
- **Online response form:** <https://www.dewr.gov.au/pacific-australia-labour-mobility-scheme/consultations/optimising-palm-scheme-delivery-australia>
- OR written responses to PALMconsultations@dewr.gov.au.



THANK YOU

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PNG Independence Day celebrations, Cairns



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